



Anne Peyton photos

*Who could write a better script? Pruett got no sleep, got his first SCCA license, started 31st, drove brilliantly to win in a car he adores.*

## Pruett's Commute

After starting at the back of the field, Scott Pruett roared to victory in the season's Trans-Am opener.

By Bill Mitchell

**Bendix** AFTER STARTING in 31st grid position, Scott Pruett made a memorable Trans-Am debut at Riverside with a win. Yes, the same Scott Pruett who finished third at Charlotte in the IMSA GTO race on Saturday, flew cross-country Saturday night, and got to bed at 2:30 a.m. (5:30 a.m. Charlotte time). On Sunday he got up at 7 a.m. to join SCCA, for which he was forced to pay \$50, and then went out and won \$11,000 in the afternoon. Talk about instant membership benefits.

Several new challengers attracted a lot of attention over the weekend — the fine handling of the Prototab Chevrolet Camaros, the sophistication of the Buicks, the new Porsche 944 Turbo. But when the field had run 100 miles around Riverside, it was another Roush 1-2-3. Trans-Am rookies Scott Pruett and Pete Halsmer led the results, while Chris Kneifel, whose second grid position was the best of his Trans-Am career, finished third following a spin. And Halsmer was in a brand new Merkur, a remarkable story in itself (see sidebar).

But Pruett was not new to his car, nor it to the Trans-Am. The same chassis carried Willy T. Ribbs to seven Trans-Am wins in 1985. This spring, Roush converted the car to a 5-liter Ford Mustang for the

IMSA GTO sprint races. Pruett drove it to victory at Road Atlanta and Laguna Seca. He also drove it to a pole and near victory at Miami, before Ribbs ended his Ford affiliation by hitting Pruett on the last lap.

Pruett was familiar enough with the car to suggest some front sway bar changes following Sunday morning warm-up. The effects of the change would be found in the race, for better or worse. And Pruett

would start 31st — he was forced to start behind the 30 drivers who met the 110 percent qualifying mark. However, he was allowed a grid position ahead of the seven drivers who missed the 110 percent mark but made the 115 percent absolute cutoff. That, of course, was in the interests of a little less terror in Turn One, as Pruett came storming through.

And Pruett certainly did some



*A favorite among fans of high-tech, Roush's Merkur was one of those rare first-try successes.*

storming. After two laps he had passed 16 drivers, but then it got tougher. "In IMSA, I am mainly fighting it out with one or two guys. Here there are a lot of good people. That's one of the biggest differences from IMSA; there's more tough people to race with."

For instance, on the fifth lap the newest Trans-Am driver met George Follmer, starting his 66th Trans-Am race. George is as tough as ever. Never mind that his grandson was sleeping on his lap in the pits, George had just returned from his ground-effects debut at Silverstone and

racing a Buick for the first time, suffered the same problem at almost exactly the same time. But the team seemed refreshed Sunday evening and crew members were eager to get on with their season. EFR ran within a second of his qualifying time "easily" in his short race (before the "black box" failed), and only four cars had quicker race laps. The Buicks' potential was untapped at Riverside.

On lap nine, Les Lindley was Pruett's next victim. Lindley, named Most Improved Driver in '85, has this year switched to a V-6 for his FSI Sprinkler



Dallenbach Jr. won the pole and looked unbeatable until the distributor left him stranded.

was looking forward to Le Mans. But Follmer has not yet found financing for a Porsche program, and his Corvette is not new — so Pruett quickly moved past him. Follmer went on to finish seventh; he started 10th.

Then Pruett faced Larry Park and Jim Derhaag. Park is probably the most underestimated Trans-Am driver. He came to road racing from the SCCA Solo II program (he and wife Pati both have multiple national championships) and does very well with his underfinanced Corvette. Park finished fifth, his best-ever Trans-Am result. Derhaag drives a Pontiac Trans Am he built himself. He qualified ninth but did not finish. Pruett moved past both before the race was 15 miles gone.

Elliott Forbes-Robinson and his Buick V-6 were next for Pruett. The 1982 Trans-Am champion is a favorite for the '86 title, but Riverside was not a good debut for the team. The sophisticated and complex Buicks from Ron Nash now feature fuel injection atop 4.5-liter V-6s from Fischer Engineering, but they failed test No. 1: They weren't ready for the first race. EFR watched from the pits all day Thursday as the tired crew completed his car. He got on track Friday only for an oil line to come off. EFR qualified eighth on Saturday but broke a crank trigger after five laps. Teammate John Schneider,

System Camaro and is enjoying the ability to go deep into the turns with the lightweight V-6. In fact, the highlight of the closing laps of the race was his assault of Kneifel's V-6 Capri. Kneifel had the top-end advantage, but Lindley harassed him in the Esses. Lindley couldn't find a way around, however, and finished fourth.

Jim Fitzgerald was next, the first turbo Pruett would face (but not the last). Fitzzy is a veteran but has few laps at Riverside, and assorted mechanical problems restricted his lap times before the race. But he did make the Fast Five in qualifying, even if it was at the back end.

Pruett chased Fitzzy through the Esses, down the straight to Turn Seven, and tried an outside pass in 7A. They went side by side through 7A, and Pruett appeared to have the inside for 7B. But Fitzzy wasn't going to be intimidated, and he took the corner back — Lesson One from the Road Atlanta chief driving instructor. In sweeping Turn Nine, Fitzzy went under Bob Zulkowski's Porsche while Pruett tried the high line, which certainly didn't work — Lesson Two. But Pruett came off Turn Nine beautifully and beat Fitzzy to Turn One to move into third.

Now Pruett had his eye on the Merkur XR4Ti of Motorcraft teammate Halsmer (Paul Newman, who was leading in his Newman-Sharp Nissan 300ZX Turbo, had

## The Life of Riley

**A**T RIVERSIDE, Bob Riley had designed three of the major contenders: the Roush Capri, the Roush Merkur and the Protofab Camaros. The latter qualified on the pole (driven by Wally Dallenbach Jr., no doubt one of the reasons for its speed). But how did Riley improve on last year's all-conquering Capris?

"In fact, these cars share absolutely no parts with the Capris," Riley says. "That design worked great, of course, but it was 2½ years old — out of date now."

"This car is fast because it handles well. That's really our only advantage — handling. The Camaro has no particular edge as far as horsepower goes. I think anybody could go buy a Dennis Fischer engine like we're using."

"In the rear suspension, we're using a four-bar setup with arms that are much longer (than the Capris), giving less roll-steer. And the driver is farther back than we've ever put him. That helps shift weight where it's more useful (a tack also used in two other GM factory teams — the Peerless GTO Camaros and the Performance Motorsports Trans-Am Buicks).

"On the engine, well, we can't equal the power-to-weight advantage that the turbo cars have. We'd like to change that, of course. I think it will change when the turbo cars start winning, race after race, and SCCA feels something has to be done. We're at 2600 lbs right now. That's why we want the new V-6 — so we can get down to 2300."

"You'd be surprised at the aerodynamics of this car (Camaro). They're all right, but not great. When I did the Capri, I found it had a blunt nose — it's a boxy car, you know — but the air seemed to go around the Capri in one smooth sheet, so it had surprisingly low drag. And the nose on that car was good because it had so little overhang, like the European cars. Look at the Mercedes and even the Merkur — hardly any bodywork beyond the front wheels. Aerodynamically, that's what you're after. But look at the Camaro — it has a huge overhang, bigger than any car in Trans-Am, I think. With that big nose out there, we get what's called aerodynamic understeer — all that wind pushing down on the nose."

The brand new Protofab Camaro's qualifying performance was no real surprise to Riley. "I'm not big on testing. We took Wally's car to the Milford (GM) proving grounds and ran it on the skidpad for three hours, then we spent a day at Willow Springs, and then we came here to race. Miller's car, on the other hand, came directly here; it never turned a wheel before the race. I'm not a big believer in testing unless you have something to test. There was nothing on these cars we didn't already know a fair bit about. You win in the shop. You come out with everything in proper working order and with some notes about the track, and you'll do fine. I think John Barnard (at McLaren) and I have the same theory about testing. The same thing happened when I designed the Mustang GTP. On its very first outing (at Elkhart Lake) it won."

-John Phillips

# Commute

been steadily pulling away from Halsmer.) As Pruett erased a seven-second deficit, Halsmer fell from one second behind Newman to eight seconds adrift. Every time Halsmer and Pruett came by the pits, a dozen Roush Racing crewmen would give the thumbs-up sign. Which was fine, but undoubtedly made it difficult for Halsmer to spot Jack Roush, who was making large hand motions indicating Halsmer should let Pruett pass. Even with only part-throttle operation, the Merkur turbo was pulling the Capri out of slow Turn Six. Pruett tried another outside pass in Turn Nine, and got another rebuff. Halsmer finally gave him a hole going into Turn Two, and Pruett filled it.

"I wasn't sure whether to let Scotty go by, because he looked like he could run a little faster than I could," Halsmer said after the race. "But I didn't want to let him go by too easy."

While everyone's attention was focused on Halsmer and Pruett, race leader Paul Newman coasted into the pits with a blown motor. The battle to see who would chase Newman had become the whole race, and Pruett was in the lead. He had moved from 31st to first in less than 30 laps. If it had happened in NASCAR, someone would write a song about it.

Then the pace car came out and everyone realized a Roush 1-2-3 was imminent. Another Roush 1-2-3. SCCA Trans-Am Technical Administrator Stuart Duncan expressed it over the staff radio: "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

## Protofab's Pole

Of those changes, the biggest was the Protofab Camaro team. Nearly every face was familiar, although driver Jim Miller had come to Chevy from Gloy Sports. Protofab's No. 1 driver, Wally Dallenbach Jr., qualified his Camaro on the pole at 1:21.34, almost a second quicker than close friend Chris Kneifel. Most of that difference was in the Esses, where Dallenbach was clearly quicker than anyone else and not looking like he was working up a sweat. Kneifel, however, was pushing the Capri to the edge, and was working hard.

Jim Miller qualified fourth, a testimony to Bob Riley's third successful Trans-Am design. Designer Riley and Protofab crew chief Charlie Selix were much more relaxed after qualifying. The start went even more their way. With Paul Newman and his turbo in third spot, you could bet the V-8s on the front row were going to have a slow start. It was slow, but Dallenbach pulled away just as Grand Marshal/Honorary Starter Jackie Stewart — a Ford man, of course — dropped the



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P.L. Newman dashed to the fore, led for half the race, suffered another infuriating failure.

EVENT SCCA Bendix Trans-Am Championship/Round 1							DATE May 18, 1986	
SITE Riverside Int'l Raceway (2.54 miles), Riverside, Calif.							WEATHER Hot, sunny	
RACE LENGTH 40 laps, 101.6 miles							ATTENDANCE 15,000	
RESULTS								QUALIFYING
Pos.	#	Driver	Chassis	Engine	Tires	Laps	Time/Status	P. Time
1	0	Scott Pruett(USA)	Mercury Capri	5.0 Ford V-8	GY	40	1h01m50.78s	31 no time
2	3	Pete Halsmer(USA)	Merkur XR4Ti	2.5 Ford 4t	GY	40	1h01m54.009s	6 1:23.480
3	2	Chris Kneifel(USA)	Mercury Capri	5.0 Ford V-8	GY	40		2 1:22.291
4	80	Les Lindley(USA)	Chevy Camaro	4.5 Chevy V-6	GY	40		7 1:23.600
5	79	Larry Park(USA)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	40		11 1:26.050
6	5	Andy Porterfield(USA)	Chevy Camaro	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	40		16 1:27.008
7	16	George Folmer(USA)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	40		10 1:25.771
8	53	Bill Doyle(USA)	Pontiac Trans Am	5.0 Pontiac V-8	GY	40		12 1:26.100
9	29	Bob Brewer(USA)	Chevy Camaro	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	40		15 1:26.932
10	31	Lee Mueller(USA)	Pontiac Firebird	5.5 Pontiac V-8	GY	39		29 1:30.175
11	9	Robert Kahn(USA)	Chevy Camaro	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	39		20 1:27.670
12	87	Gary Mathews(USA)	Chevy Camaro	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	39		14 1:26.883
13	44	Bob Sobey(USA)	Pontiac Trans Am	5.0 Pontiac V-8	GY	39		24 1:28.880
14	21	Pete Brallier(USA)	Pontiac Trans Am	6.0 Pontiac V-8	GY	39		26 1:29.800
15	17	Rick Stark(USA)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	39		27 1:29.870
DNF	98	Ross Bentley(USA)	Pontiac Trans Am	5.0 Pontiac V-8	GY	37	not running	23 1:28.830
17	18	Glenn Fox(USA)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	37		30 1:30.200
18	56	Karl Durkheimer(USA)	Porsche 911	3.5 Porsche 6	GY	37		34 1:30.770
19	26	Bob Zulkowski(USA)	Porsche 911SC	3.2 Porsche 6	GY	37		38 1:34.250
20	65	Mike Higgins(USA)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	36		19 1:27.585
21	90	John Klug(USA)	Porsche 911-T	3.0 Porsche 6t	FS	33		36 1:33.310
DNF	33	Paul Newman(USA)	Nissan 300ZX-T	2.8 Nissan V-6t	GY	26	engine	3 1:22.412
DNF	67	Frank Pool(CDN)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	22	not running	28 1:30.085
DNF	52	Rick Ware(USA)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	21	not running	17 1:27.270
DNF	10	Jerry Miller(USA)	Chevy IROC Camaro	4.5 Chevy V-6	HO	20	not running	21 1:27.872
DNF	38	Jim Fitzgerald(USA)	Nissan 300ZX-T	2.8 Nissan V-6t	GY	18	hose	5 1:23.276
DNF	81	Jim Doughty(USA)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	15	not running	37 1:33.730
DNF	83	Vic Manuelli(USA)	Mercury Capri	5.0 Ford V-8	GY	14	not running	39 1:34.320
DNF	40	Jim Derhaag(USA)	Pontiac Trans Am	6.0 Pontiac V-8	GY	10	not running	9 1:25.685
DNF	41	Bill Craine(USA)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	9	not running	35 1:30.900
DNF	28	Jim Miller(USA)	Chevy Camaro	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	8	distributor	4 1:23.011
DNF	99	Mark Pielsticker(USA)	Chevy Camaro	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	8	not running	22 1:28.183
DNF	72	Bruce Jenner(NZ)	Pontiac Trans Am	5.0 Pontiac V-8	GY	7	not running	33 no time
DNF	66	John Schneider(USA)	Buick Somerset	4.5 Buick V-6	GY	7	electrics	13 1:26.470
DNF	6	Elliott Forbes-Robinson(USA)	Buick Somerset	4.5 Buick V-6	GY	5	electrics	8 1:24.020
DNF	27	Rich Sloma(USA)	Chevy Corvette	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	3	suspension	18 1:27.370
DNF	77	Dan Croft(USA)	Chevy Monte Carlo	6.0 Chevy V-8	0	engine	GY	25 1:29.101
DNF	4	Wally Dallenbach Jr.(USA)	Chevy Camaro	5.0 Chevy V-8	GY	0	distributor	1 1:21.340
DNS	7	Ludwig Heimrath Jr.(CDN)	Porsche 944-T	2.5 Porsche 4t	GY	-	engine	32 no time
DNS	01	Perrian Henry(USA)	Pontiac Firebird	5.0 Pontiac V-8	GY	-	percent rule	40 2:34.441
FASTEST RACE LAP Pruett 1:24.037 (108.809mph)							AVERAGE SPEED 98.56mph	
LAP LEADERS Jim Miller 1-7; Newman 8-25; Halsmer 26; Pruett 27-40							TIRE CODES: AV, Avon; BG, BFGoodrich; BR, Bridgestone; DU, Dunlop; FS, Firestone; GY, Goodyear; HO, Hoosier; MC, McCreary; MH, M&H; MI, Michelin; PI, Pirelli; YO, Yokohama	



Jim Miller said the Prototab Camaro was a delight; he qualified fourth and briefly led.

green. Jim Miller was in second place before he reached Turn One, a Prototab 1-2. But it was a 1-2 that lasted only to the back straight, where Dallenbach pulled off course with a broken distributor.

Jim Miller was then leading a Trans-Am for the first time, and Chris Kneifel in second was higher than he had ever been. That lasted for seven laps, until Kneifel tried to dive under Miller in Turn Seven, locked up his brakes, and tapped the Camaro in the rear. Both spun, and Paul Newman moved into the lead. Kneifel recovered and finished third. Miller took longer to get going, then, like his teammate, broke a rotor in his distributor. A disappointing debut for a promising car. Look for them at Sears Point, with a new ignition system. As Bob Riley said, "We'll be back." □

## Riverside Trans-Am Notebook

**T**RANS-AM WINNER Scott Pruett climbed into his Roush Racing Capri at Riverside only after he had flown overnight from the IMSA race in Charlotte. When he arrived Sunday morning, he had no SCCA license. Once that formality was out of the way, Pruett eight hours later won his first Trans-Am. "I imagine that's a record," said Scott after the race. Indeed.

- Paul Newman was clocked on the Riverside straightaway at 155mph, the highest speed measured of any Trans-Am car during the weekend. Yet, he said he was losing ground in the corners to several cars, including the Prototab Camaros. The problem? "I can't control the attitude of the car in turns, because of turbo lag. When you want the power to position the car, it's not there. I'm losing too much in Turns Six, Seven and 7A."

On all other topics, however, Newman was inscrutable. Will the team this year contest the whole Trans-Am? "Don't know. I can't decide those things. Some time this year, I may have to go work." Why did you buy a share of Bob Sharp's team? "I'm building an empire." Who will win the title this year? "Caspar Weinberger; he's winning everything." Will the heat be a factor in the race? "Yes. It cuts power in our motors, and it decreases driver performance. Fitz (Jim Fitzgerald) and I will wait for the young guys to weaken."

They never got the chance, however. Newman led the race until his engine failed, and Fitzgerald was a contender until the 15th lap, when "water came out of the engine compartment at the kink," he said. "I was going 155mph and all of a sudden the rear end was gone. I thought I bought it all. That scared the hell out of me."

- Both the Prototab Camaros and the Performance Motorsports Buicks are using Brembo brakes. The new-to-Trans-Am anchors are a result of GM's recommen-

dation. Evidently, Kelsey-Hayes owns the Italian brake manufacturer, whose products have appeared on F1 Ferraris for some time.

- The Prototab Camaros have large, unique air scoops just aft of the side-window openings. The scoops feed a tremendous quantity of air to an engine-oil cooler that is located in what would be the car's trunk. Are the scoops legal? "According to the rules, those inlets are in the cockpit," said one team member. "Nothing wrong with that."

Both of the Camaros, blazingly fast in qualifying, were felled by distributor problems — the very same problem, said a team member, that repeatedly stopped the Spirit of Entertainment Camaro at Sebring, also with Dallenbach Jr. aboard.

- American driving legend George Follmer was at Riverside but was not in the Fabcar Porsche 944 as expected. Instead, he was in an aging Corvette. "We cut up the old Corvette and kind of redesigned it," Follmer said. But he kept tradition intact: The car bore on its flanks No. 16.

- What happened to the much-anticipated Porsche 944 Turbo attack? Apparently, the engines remain a problem. "I'd like to race a Porsche rather than a Chevy," said George Follmer. "But I'm not willing to pay for the engine development on the car."

Ludwig Heimrath Jr. showed up in one of the new 944s, but had only one engine. When the team suffered "a system failure," they packed up (on Saturday) and went home. And last year's Porsche stalwart, Paul Miller, was at the race but with no car. It is possible that Miller could end up in a Roush Capri!

- Another car that had only one engine for the entire weekend was the Merkur. The little turbomotor had been used all week in heavy testing, and the team was unsure how

long it would live. There was thus no turn-up-the-boost banzai qualifying effort (nevertheless it qualified fifth, just "an eyelash out of the Fast Five," as Halsmer put it), and during the race, the driver was instructed to short-shift, keeping revs at a bare minimum.

The SCCA was curious about the Merkur in post-race teardown. Was Roush Racing's Lee White worried? "Not a chance," he said. "They can check and measure and examine until the cows come home. It's legal." During the teardown, Jack Roush looked at the four-cylinder motor and, in his best coroner's voice, said of the far-from-dead engine, "I want an autopsy on this right away."

Nobody, including Ford reps from SVO, believed the Merkur would finish its very first race. Even chief fabricator Jim Ikish, before the race, was pessimistic, expecting fuel-feed problems. "We never had time to map out a proper fuel-delivery system," he said. "We just guessed."

- Gary Pratt, the man who engineered the successful run of Roush-Prototab chassis last year, may begin an "assembly line" again for the Prototab-built Camaros. Said designer Bob Riley, "If we start building more cars, it won't be until September or October." Pratt was not so sure, saying, "GM keeps us too busy. I don't think we'll have time this year. Maybe this winter."

- Although no price was mentioned for a possible Prototab customer car, Jack Roush will sell in a couple months customer Merkurs, with engine, for a cool \$95,000. There will probably be few takers, however, until more is known about the all-new four-cylinder turbomotor, copies of which remain few.

Because only one Merkur was available, Pete Halsmer drove it and continued to act as development driver for the team. The second Merkur is expected for Chris Kneifel at Sears Point, although Chris said, "You probably won't see it until Portland (June 14)." □